

features

Part one: Female presence within the rec center

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Students are welcomed by the sound of dribbles and free weights being dropped. There is a faint smell of chlorine and rubber throughout the building. The Ashland University rec center offers many opportunities for physical activity such as the climbing wall, GroupX classes, cardio machines and weight machines.

The fitness center, which houses cardio equipment and the weight area, is undoubtedly one of the busiest spaces in the rec.

Nonetheless, it seems that the weight area is almost always full of men. With free weights that start at five pounds and end at 100 pounds, it is unusual to see women in the mix.

The weight area also includes two squat racks, three adjustable benches, three flat bench presses, one incline and one decline bench press.

There could be a few reasons for the lack of female presence. Perhaps women are timid when it comes to physical strength or men are too overbearing.

Alexa Yuschak, sophomore early childhood education major, feels embarrassed and unknowledgeable when lifting weights. “I feel judged all the time,” she

throughout the day, Molnar said. “We have also slowly built up the amount of weights that are in there pound-wise,” she said.

Many women may feel pressure to only use cardio equipment because of the perception that it is the way to lose weight.

Molnar believes that with a lack of knowledge on how to lift weights, women are also attracted to the simplicity of cardio.

“I think that unless you were an athlete in high school and you did lifting with your team, then you might not be aware of how to do it,” she said. “But cardio machines, you just get on and go.”

Many rec centers have implemented instructional classes in order to teach patrons how to lift weights safely and effectively. The AU rec center has not.

“I don’t think it’s our obligation to provide that but it would be a nice additional service,” Molnar said. “I think it is our obligation to provide something for everyone to do something recreationally or fitness-related.”

Like Yuschak, Maggie George, sophomore music education major, does not feel knowledgeable about lifting weights.

“There’s a specific way to do things and there are people who are knowledgeable, but it is hard if you’re not,” she said. “You could go once, could be doing it



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The aerobics room provides a large variety of weight sizes.

If there were to be a high demand for a female trainer, Molnar said she would look into bringing on someone new, she said.

GroupX classes are a good option for students who prefer to have someone lead their workout. Yuschak has found comfort within these classes, frequently attending cycling and dance aerobics.

“I like that it’s a whole group, usually all girls, and everyone is on the same level,” she said.

George, who is also a Zumba GroupX instructor at the rec, loves how empowering Zumba is for women.

“One of their goals is to empower and you should walk out feeling confident and that you had fun and that you want to do it again,” she said. “It doesn’t have to feel like a workout, you’re having fun and you’re loving yourself.”

Although this class is meant to be enjoyable, George can tell that not everyone who walks in feels confident.

“Some people want the lights off because they don’t want other people to see them or to see themselves,” she said. “They always feel like everyone is watching them the whole time but I promise they’re all just as stressed as you.”

The mirrors in the aerobics room can be intimidating for some, especially women. Nonetheless, as a dancer, George recognizes how important the mirrors can be.

“You have to have mirrors in there because sometimes you need to be able to see yourself and others to make sure you’re doing it right,” she said.

GroupX numbers are better this year than they were last year,

however, attendance has been stronger in the past, Molnar said.

“I’m really not sure why people are stepping away from the instructional classes,” she said.

George believes that GroupX classes are a great option for members, but not many people know about them.

“The GroupX schedule is inside the rec so it becomes a matter of getting people inside,” she said. “GroupX classes are really a great place to start because they have different things for all different parts of your body.”

Molnar admits that GroupX classes have remained predominantly women, despite efforts to incorporate male instructors. Similarly, the rec changed their marketing efforts for intramural sports to encourage more female involvement.

“It didn’t necessarily change anything,” she said. “I think in every aspect of life, there’s things that women tend to go towards and things that men tend to go towards.”

The cause in separation between men and women in the rec center, is a mix between society’s standards and Ashland’s culture, Molnar said.

“When someone comes in they’re going to fit into the norms of what Ashland is and what has already been established,” she said.

George finds that her biggest problem with working out at the rec is the crowded spaces.

“Sometimes it gets very crowded in the stretching area and that gets awkward and you can’t go in the aerobics room if there’s a class,” she said.

Although it can be difficult to create spaces for individuals,

Molnar realizes the importance of doing so.

“Individuals are really looking for their own spaces to do workouts but be able to have all the equipment and be able to do it without being in front of everyone,” she said. “It’s important to maximize spaces so that it permits and allows for all individuals to feel comfortable in working out.”

The rec center has partnered with the FitDegree app to ensure that students are aware of the busyness of the facility before entering. Members can then prepare and choose which time is best for them to workout.

“It can be intimidating if you want to try something new but you don’t want to go when there are a lot of people,” Molnar said.

She consistently looks for feedback and suggestions from students to incorporate the needs of everyone, male or female.

For women who feel embarrassed to workout at the rec, George recommends going with a friend or trying something that is already structured, such as GroupX.

As for Yuschak, she continues to find confidence and empowerment after each workout.

“I always feel so much better about myself and it gives me a burst of energy,” she said.

Read part two: Equality within female athletics on AU-Live.com



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A few free weights can be found on the track in an effort to create another space to lift.

said. “People probably aren’t even looking at me but I never go by the squat machines because I don’t want to go over there.”

Yuschak admits that she rarely sees girls in the weight area.

“When you go in there and there’s the big weights and the bench press, I feel like that’s for guys,” she said. “I don’t want to be the only girl over there.”

The AU rec center has taken some initiatives to increase student comfort level when working out, understanding that every person, male or female, has different needs.

“A couple years ago, we moved the lighter weights from the inside to the outside near the game room,” Janel Molnar, director of the rec center, said. “That way, women felt as though they had a space within that area and they weren’t stuck in the middle of the men.”

There are also other areas of the facility where free weight equipment can be found, such as on the track and in the aerobics room, Molnar said.

When the rec first opened, the aerobics room was only available to members when GroupX classes were being held. They shortly realized it would be beneficial to provide another space and decided to keep the door unlocked

wrong or you could get frustrated and never come back again.”

There are posters and binders in the fitness center that provide exercises for different muscle groups, however, George tries to avoid this area.

“It’s kind of awkward because you don’t want to be the person that’s reading the signs and doesn’t know what to do while you’re there,” she said.

The rec center full-time staff has begun a conversation about a free weight training class to be offered in the spring of 2020. The logistics are not set in stone, Molnar said.

“So much of what we do is based on trends and what’s going on nationwide with other campus recreation centers,” she said. “We look to see what other people are doing and then the needs of the AU community.”

If a member of the rec center does not know where to start when working out, a personal trainer is available for an additional cost. However, there is only a male trainer on staff.

“We haven’t necessarily marketed for another trainer simply because the clientele doesn’t really permit for that in terms of the amount of clients that we have,” Molnar said.



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The fitness center includes posters with visual tutorials for strength training.